

# Echoes from Cliff || Dwellings

Versicles of the  
Mesa Verde

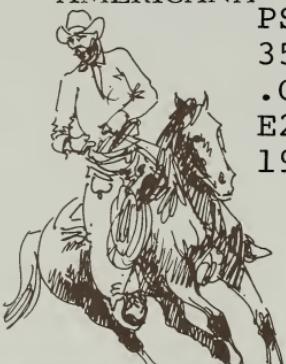


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Versicles of the  
Mesa Verde

By  
Jean Milne Gower

BY JEAN MILNE GOWER

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THE KALEIDOSCOPE  
(Little Pictures of Colorado)

BEADS OF NAMAQUA  
LAND OF THE WESTERING SUN  
SKYLINES

ECHOES FROM CLIFF DWELLINGS  
(Versicles of the Mesa Verde)

THIRD EDITION

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UPB

To "The Poet-Packmaster of the Mesa Verde",  
ARTHUR B. HARDIN

are these simple verses dedicated by their  
author in appreciation of the inspiration  
she has found in his pictorial and poetic  
records of the beautiful land of his choice.



Many of the verses contained in this  
collection have appeared in the *New York  
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# Echoes from Cliff Dwellings

## Little Theatres

The curtains of lost years rise stealthily  
In Little Theatres along the Great Dream Way.  
Down all the canons swing their moonbeam signs;  
Spirit call-boys in noiseless sandals  
Slip swiftly to dressing-rooms under dark cliffs.  
Hark! Do you not hear the call-bells?—  
No, they are not the mule bells on the mesa,  
But they may be hare-bells, enchanted ones,  
perhaps—  
Telling the actors that the scene is ready.  
Towers, hovels, palaces, for comedy and tragedy—  
all is set.  
Hush! here they come, the silent actors,  
Marching to silent pipes and toneless tom-toms;  
They are like figures painted on sheer gauze—  
Exquisite—ephemeral—  
Men and women in sarapes not woven on earth-  
looms;  
Lithe young braves with eagle feathers on dark  
heads  
With bows and arrows tensely held;  
Maidens with hair in squash blossoms  
And soft skin showing where their woven drapery  
Falls open from bronze shoulders.  
They begin—then pause—  
Hark! Some Philistine  
Up there on the canon's rim  
Has spoken—jeered, perhaps.  
Again it has grown dark,  
A cloud has put out all the little signs;  
The actors vanish and the curtains are rung down—  
Could those have been the mule bells ringing there  
Among the pinon trees and juniper?  
No, no, I never shall believe they were.

## As Dust Are the Dead Years

“Tat-chu, tell me the age of these strange dwellings  
In the cliffs,” one asked an ancient Indian.  
He did not answer, but bent down from his tall height  
His thin old body  
And in his hand he gathered up some dust  
And let it trickle through his claw-like fingers.  
As each grain caught a rainbow from the sun  
The old man slowly spoke:  
“Years to my fathers are the same as these.”

## Cliff Palace

Seen across the canon from Sun Point,  
Surrounded by dream citadels you stand,  
Palace of the Eternal Cliffs.  
Your walls, some fallen, some erect  
As when first built,  
Speak of past privacies  
For dwellers long since gone  
To seek your shadowy prototype beyond.  
Square tower and round tower mark your chieftain's  
palace,  
More than a score of kivas prove that law  
Was here expounded to the neighbor clans.  
What orders issued by the Speaker Chief  
From his stone platform against tower wall  
Have crashed and echoed down the canon  
To one-house clans and dwellers on the rim!  
What ceremonial dances have been given  
In pagan pageantry upon your courts!

## Mesa Verde

Oh, they had often shown me pictures of the Mesa Verde  
They had painted me word pictures of its charm and  
mystic scenes,

But never had I dreamed a tithe of all its haunting wonder  
'Till I sat upon its mesas and looked down its deep  
ravines.

Nor could I grasp its vast content, its stored-up peace and  
patience,

The reticence of mighty things which have so much  
to tell,

Which need not babble secrets that are gossip of the ages  
While eternities lurk everywhere with overwhelming  
spell.

A Psalm of Peace they sing us, I think, these verdant  
mesas,

A-throng with spirits of a race who ever longed for  
peace,

A race who made its daily invocation for enlightenment  
A race whose invocation for life's calm will never  
cease.

For they have writ in living rock a canticle of glory,  
A story all the world may read—God grant it under-  
stand—

That souls seek lasting dwelling in vast love of man for  
man

Instead of building foolish castles on the shifting  
sand.

## Sun Worshipers

Oh, I have brought in my cupped hands,  
A draught for you, Beloved.

See, in the mirror of the water's changing  
surface

There are little broken bits of sun,  
Glints of life and love for you to drink.

## The Metate Mesa Verde

“Crunch—crunch” ’tis the sound of maize,  
Pale gold grain of the olden days,  
Being ground in the mortar by ghostly hand  
In the grey courtyard of Mesa land—  
Mesas still verdant since those far years  
Have passed with their burthen of hopes and fears.  
Bent forms I see in the fading light,  
Grinding their corn before coming night  
Sends them a-scurry to cliff-hidden homes  
Safe from the nomad who prowls and roams,  
Seeking these earliest home-makers’ store  
Back of the mud-plastered willow door.  
“Crunch—crunch” ’tis the sound of maize,  
Pale gold maize of the olden days;  
The ancient metate is echoing once more  
To the grinding of grain on the courtyard floor.

## Canons at Sunset

Gold edged with crimson gashes  
Lie the canons at sunset hour.  
It is as though some tomahawk of rugged stone  
Had hewn in frenzy at the greenery of hillsides  
And hacked out beauty,  
Blood-besmeared but glorious.

## A Prayer Basket

Woven in design emblematic,  
Butterflies for hope—  
And rainbows, too!  
There must have been happiness and hope about  
When you were planned.

## Spruce Tree House

The ribboned cliffs cast back their shadow ways  
That foil your shell-pink creaminess of tint  
And greenery of underbrush creeps up,  
To spin contrast of color for your walls.  
Like little scene set for a mimic play  
Your kivaed village lies—a dreamland set,  
Foregrounded by one lofty red-spruce tree.  
There from the ruined walls the windows look  
Out on the canon with its strange allure.  
The dignity of centuries and quiet  
Of dreams that drift into reality  
By reason of some mighty truth unknown—  
These silence every doubt of verity;  
These lead us reverently to that far day  
When men sought silence—then went on their way.

## Mesa Winds

Wind, Wind upon the mesa, what are you saying—  
What are you whispering to the cedar trees  
That they should murmur so?  
And to the pinons that they  
Should bulk their greenery against you shuddering,  
Fearing the mad fierceness  
Of your caress?  
The wind swept down the rocky rim of the canon  
Bending a stubborn scrub oak to its will—  
“I am kissing them as I have kissed the canon walls  
Ages on ages,  
Wearing out habitation spots for races  
Long since gone their way into eternities;  
I, who now kiss the trees until they die,  
Will ever find new trees to tell  
My secrets to,  
New rock to wear with the erosion of  
My tireless lips.”

## Painted House\*

And now they call it by some other name,  
Quaint little house under the eaves of stone—  
“New Fire House”—which oddly brings to mind  
Civic foresight to foil the God of Flame.  
But when I creep alone  
Up to that wonder house, sometimes I think  
I see an artist there, wielding a brush  
Laying on mural colors made of clay,  
Outside, the white back of a bench of stone  
Shines where some vandal has removed  
All but the snake or water lines.  
But in the painted rooms, upon the walls,  
Still show the stories of the hunt and chase,  
The mountain peaks, the lightning’s ragged cleft,  
The dream immortal artistry has left.

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\*New Fire House.

## Rainbow Flowers

The Indians say, “All flowers that fade,  
Bloom again in the rainbow,” and I think it is  
true  
That the little ghost flowers are a-blossom,  
don’t you?  
Up there where hope arches are magically made  
To promise the sky is still blue.  
Perhaps if we try, we can sense the perfume  
Of flowers who have gone to the rainbow to  
dwell.  
Or can hear the soft stories the earth-flowers  
tell  
While Nature is decking them from her dream-loom  
To remind us that all things are well.

## Knife Edge Cliff Road

Oh, the sky is cleft by your serrate edge  
High rimming the Mancos shale  
As we of the out-world skim to the past  
Along your dizzy trail.  
We yearn toward the Moccasin Canon side  
Where the hermits dwelt unseen  
And penitents prisoned worked out their doom  
In caves in the deep ravine.  
We shudder at sheerness of cliffs up-piled  
Overhanging the shifting plain  
Where the little clouds make vagrant blots  
And never come again.  
Oh, never the same little clouds will smile  
Into lakes on their foothilled vale.  
As we spin past the rim of the sandstone frieze  
That tops the Mancos shale.  
Oh, the thrill of it—the maddening thrill  
As life and death compete  
On the Knife Edge Road into Mesa-land  
Where the sky and mountain meet!

## A Love Song

Oh, I will fashion me a lute,  
I will fashion it from a red willow wand.  
I will play upon it what I have learned from the  
stream  
That brings to the red willow its life.  
My song will bring to her, my star-eyed one,  
Who lives in the palace under the cliff,  
A message from the humble dweller  
In the lodge on the mesa above.

## Blue Feather Robe

Here in Pool Canon in the Mummy House  
Under cave-dust of ages were you found  
Robe of Blue Feathers.  
How many little lives went out in violence  
That you might grow  
Into a thing of beauty!  
How many little shimmering throats  
Fell silent suddenly  
That you might sing in color down long years!  
The daughter of some mighty chief, perhaps,  
Treasured your downy warmth,  
Your beauty—  
Wore you a space then went her way  
Her mortal form wrapped in your blueness  
As she crossed the Border-line  
Over the rim into eternal blue.

## Sea Shells

Impress of sea shells in the tufa stone  
Upon the low wall in a lofty niche  
Wherein was built a little nesting place  
For people of the past. Perhaps some witch  
Flew on her soap-weed broom across the sky  
And scattered charms from oceans far away;  
Perhaps she placed some spell on those who dwelt  
Remote from seas in that far fairy-day;  
Perhaps she caused the mesa trees to moan  
In tune with ocean's throbbing in each shell  
And made the haunted folk forsake their home  
In fear of fancied breakers. Who can tell?

## Balcony House

O balcony, built many moons ago—  
So many, many mesa moons ago—  
To tempt the maid above—the youth below.

O little ledge of cunning masonry  
Set out to catch the moonbeams' witchery,  
To tempt the Romeos of antiquity,

How can you lie there so demure and trite  
As though you never knew of lovers' plight  
When balconies bathe in the mad moonlight?

'Tis vain to say that centuries have made  
A new commandment in Love's accolade—  
Youth's memories of moonbeams never fade.

## Prayer Plumes

Little painted sticks,  
Potent, indeed, are you when your bound feathers  
Catch the upward air  
And carry unto Those Above your prayer—  
Be it for rain or lucky chase,  
Or be it for success in battlefare—  
'Tis only the matter of a varied tint  
In feathering or coloring your shaft.  
And, should you not be there at hand  
When need arises,  
The pious one may cross two little twigs  
And place a stone thereon  
That the mighty gods may see.  
Strange that the emblem of the Cross should be  
Almost as good as a painted prayer plume.

## Metates at Cliff Palace

In a row they must have knelt at the metates  
Those grinders of sweet maize  
On sunny days,  
Under the cool cliff grinding, grinding, grinding,  
Talking and singing as their tireless stones  
Ground the corn coarsely first,  
Then finer—finer—  
Until 'twas like gold sand in a crystal hour glass  
Marking the passing of their peaceful days.

## Lizards

What do you know, little sleek lizards,  
Slipping along on rock balconies,  
Your bright eyes peeping here and there,  
Your tails a seeming rudder?  
What do you know?  
Have your forefathers told you tales and legends  
Of how they, too, sunned on the rocky ledges  
And listened to the history told and told  
By old men in the kivas  
To youths of many generations?  
O little belegged serpents,  
You look so very wise,  
And your small diamond eyes  
Must have seen things—  
Strange things.

## Inscrutable

Chrome-colored marl backgrounds a jug  
Taken from an arcaded cliff;  
Cryptic it stands with its secret unrevealed  
By the symbolic bordering whose portent  
Is lost in antiquity.

## Battle Ship Rock

Along your course you sail, O Ship of Rock,  
Sometimes in the early dawn of day  
You are a transport, painted battle gray,  
And on your decks are silent men in khaki.

Again at noon you swim in mistiness  
A-swirl in alkaline dust,  
Or stand clean cut against a red-hot sky  
An ocean liner ploughing through the main  
With prow turned home again.

Or sometimes when the sun is sinking fast  
Baptizing you with last ecstatic rays,  
You are a galleon of olden days  
Bearing bright treasure from far lands;  
Jade, emeralds, rubies, amethysts  
Garland your sides  
And fling back gleam for gleam.

But, oh, at night—when silver moonlight falls,  
Then are you like some pleasure yacht becalmed;  
All the chameleon tints blend into silver.  
One dreams of gondolas that well might be  
Threading the canon ways. Venetian boat songs  
Echo against cliffs and mule bells ring  
A madrigal out there upon the mesa.  
Then all the dear, dead cities of the past  
Turn to Italian palaces or Grecian temples  
By some strange fancy of moon-alchemy.

## Mesa Trails

Where the women of ancient dwellings  
Once gathered pinon nuts  
In cunningly woven baskets,  
There ran the little footpath trails  
Worn smooth by yucca sandals.  
Now to and fro across the well-made roads  
Purr shining motor cars:  
Still, down the canon ways  
The pack train creeps to far off homes  
Not seen by hurrying crowds.  
The little "seldom" homes of Mesa-land  
Where one still catches  
The ghost folk working at their trade  
Or dreaming in the dim, inviting shade.

## Two-Story House

This must have been a mansion in its day—  
So isolate it lies in dignity  
Amidst the crumbled walls of lesser buildings.  
Now do the pack rats lead a riotous life  
In crumpled kiva and unused metate  
Bringing in spoils from elsewhere  
To be cached.

## Sipapu

Sipapu—Strange word that to the Indian means  
So much of rest, so much of Heaven!  
To him, it is the Great Beyond,  
So far and yet so very, very near  
That he may whisper to the Forces there  
Each day from sacred kivas anywhere.

## Sun Temple

Built upon Sun Point, unshaded,  
Vast in its conception,  
Sun Temple lies, unfinished,  
Abandoned by some strange, erratic race  
Which seemed to dream a thing into stone form  
Then fade away to silence.  
Four centuries or more have left their mark  
Upon a tree cut from the debris heap  
Before Sun Temple's walls were brought again to  
light;  
How long the tree's roots have sought nourishment  
In century-piled mound, one does not know.  
Nor does one know what tropic suns  
Had caused rich sap to flow  
In the palm leaf—long fossiled and placed there  
By sages of the cliffs.  
To them it was an emblem of the Sun  
An etching of his rays upon the sand  
To be enshrined and worshiped.  
Perhaps these ceremonials to the God of Light  
Persist unto this day;  
Perhaps the worshipers still come  
To their half-finished shrines  
And offer sacrifice;  
Perhaps the burden of an incomplete concept  
Weighs upon their souls.  
Or are they happy in Sipapu  
Knowing at last that the Great Powers above  
Judge by intent—  
Not by accomplishment.

## Little Red Foxes

Baying to the moon are the little red foxes,  
All silvered with moonbeams like powdered spruce.  
And up above, the owl hoots dismally—  
It seems so foolish to that wise one  
That little red foxes should bay to the moon.

## Eagle Nest House

Such an eyrie for a man to choose—  
No wonder that he built it more secure  
Than less adventurous houses need be built.  
Its tilted poled roof-tree,  
Still holds together, bound by yucca cords;  
Its whitewashed walls still bear recorded there  
Traditional and tribal signs  
Which we, alas, may never understand.

## Casa Colorado

Warmth is your keynote, Casa Colorado,  
You are distinguished by your ruddy hue  
Amidst the sombre grey and pale ecru  
Of habitations hereabout.  
Did you dream dreams prophetic long ago  
As you lay bathed in sunshine  
A little brighter than of that about you?  
Did you have vision that in far, far days to come,  
Vast tracts of plain,  
Where antelope and bison long had roamed,  
And mountain ranges where wild beasts had  
prowled,  
Might be marked out by lines drawn through the air  
And named as you are named,  
O Casa Colorado?

## Famine

The sacred meal is low; the wallet you fashioned  
From the soft skin of a fawn  
Is fallen together  
Like the seedless pod of lupine.  
I go, beloved, to make incantation  
That rain may come to the mesa.

## Listening In

Are you listening in, O Dwellers in Swallows' nests,  
O builders of great stone towers,  
Of kivas, of sun palaces?  
Are aerials flung wide—  
Fastened from star to star—  
Are you so high, so far?  
Or are your aerials hung  
Across the little pinon trees you loved so well,  
And are you listening very near  
Hearing your praises sung,  
Sometimes indifferently, as modern men go by  
And look upon your handiwork with patronage?  
We who build for today—great scrapers of the sky,  
Who build great ships for fighting other men,  
Who fly great birds across the blue of heaven  
To carry deadly fire—we patronize you,  
You who have worshiped holy fire!  
What do you think?  
Of these our puny ones who praise or cavil?  
Can you but teach one, two or three of us  
Content of peace  
In the possessing of small things,  
Then are your lessons written in the air  
To vibrate upon eons yet to come.  
You have not lived in vain,  
O little Dwellers of the Creamy Cliffs,  
Facing the sunset and the dawn  
With faith in some great god  
You did not know—

## Little Coyotes

The buck-brush makes a purple veil  
For the little coyotes, and so  
They slink along on the dawnlight trail  
Yapping matins as they go.

## The Dancing Court

I seem to see maidens with flying feet  
Out there in the moonlight.  
Are they moccasined or are they bare  
With twinkling toes sipping the air  
Out there in the night?  
Or are they golden-slippered or crystal-shod  
Like prehistoric Cinderellas?  
O wraiths of cliff dwelling maidens,  
I prithee pause a space and let me see  
Whether your skins are white or brown or tawny.  
Remove your teasing veils of mist,  
Fair maidens out there in the Dancing Court!  
Or fear you to be kissed  
By venturous moonbeams?  
Fie! Fie! Why be so coy?  
Are not these still the self-same saucy beams  
Who kissed you ages past and set this tryst  
Out there in the Dancing Court?

## Sundown House

At Sundown House by Seeping Springs  
The last rays of a setting sun  
Linger and love the earth  
With an ardor more intense  
Because they know their going hence  
Is near at hand.  
They do not now remember, these royal, ravishing  
rays,  
That there will be other loves and other days  
In Mesaland.

## The Warden (Point Lookout)

Crowned by his ancient watch-tower,  
Brooding above the plain,  
Point Lookout stands, the warden  
Of Mesa-land Domain.

About him the panorama  
Of painted prairies float  
By whim of clouds sent shifting  
To vistas far remote.

Blues and La Salles of Utah  
Arizona, New Mexican peaks  
Swim on the rim of horizons  
Where Illusion her dream-form seeks.

To north, in snow-capped beauty,  
Is Lone Cone of the great San Juan;  
To east, march La Plata Mountains  
With their silver armor on;

To west sleeps the Ute serenely  
In rock-hewn effigy;  
While out toward the south, the Mesa  
Trails her lure of mystery—

She is gashed by abysmal canons  
Whose caverned rims have made  
Homes for a vanished people  
Long drifted into shade.

O Lookout, ageless guardian,  
What secrets do you know?  
Where did the dream-folk vanish  
In centuries long ago?

## The Pack Master

Leading his cavalcade along rough, rarely-traveled  
trails,  
Comes the pack-master,  
His keen eyes shaded by his limp sombrero.  
For him each path leads to some sacred shrine,  
While from his lips fall sagas of an ancient people  
Who haunt him with their spell.  
In his clapboarded cabin, bright with woven  
blankets,  
He treasures archives of his own fond making  
Picture and verses pay graphic tribute  
To cliff and mesa.  
In terms none but a zealot could conceive.  
His is no rhapsody to fit a passing need;  
His is such fire as once baptized apostles  
And bade them follow in their Master's lead.

## A Juniper Cedar

Five centuries or more have wound their yearly ring  
About your staunch old heart,  
Juniper Cedar Tree,  
Since first your thirsting roots sank questingly  
Into this burial mound of prehistoric man.  
Sometimes your branches hum strange melodies;  
Sometimes a wiley woodpecker  
Beats rapid tom-toms on your roughened bark  
Swiftly lest we discover what things his tom-toms  
say  
To those dull ears below your purple-berried  
branches.

## The Way of the Moon

I've walked with you the way of the moon,  
O wraith folk of far-away days,  
And I know why you chose the creamy cliffs—  
The salmon-toned, beetling, wind-quarried cliffs,  
To build your cameo dwellings in.  
Oh, might I choose for my very own an abiding place  
I would build me a swallow's nest  
Under a rocky cliff  
With the canon tumbling to chaos below,  
The red rocks poising like giants to leap  
Into the mists below—  
With the balsam odors of mesa lands  
Sweeping across to me,  
And the way of the moon leading to a world  
Of dreamy witchery.

## Far View House

They have brought you forth from cerements of  
dust,  
House of Far Vistas;  
They have cleared the sage and chapparal  
From off your burial dome and brought to light  
Living-rooms, kivas, granaries, metates,  
With baskets, ollas and all things which answered  
needs primeval.  
Now, from your dancing court and roofless battle-  
ments,  
Strangers drink in the view incomparable,  
Of shifting prairies floating wide beyond the mesas  
And misty mountain ranges all adrift.  
How can folk say today that it was not sheer loveli-  
ness  
Which caused your indwellers to choose this site?  
If it were chosen just that their prairie foes be seen  
Then did these mesa dwellers of Far View possess  
Sad, beauty-cheated eyes.

## The Mug House

Painted mugs they left there in their flight—  
These People of the Cliffs—  
Bright colored mugs and many bows and arrows  
In a cold, bleak house,  
One of a little group under the hood of stone.  
I wonder, in their scattering  
Across the sun-baked plains,  
Did they not wish again  
For those painted mugs  
And the cool water of the spring  
Under the shadowed ledge.

## Dusk on the Mesa

Birds are at their vespers  
And rose-pink clouds are dreaming into grey  
Mystery of purple and blue shadows  
Are falling curtainwise; while far away  
The mountain ranges seem to be forgetting  
Whether they are clouds or granite.  
Dusk enwraps the Mesa in a vast content  
And silence unbelievable.

## Door Steps

Worn by the humble feet of dwellers  
In secluded houses tucked away  
In tiny crannies where their sepias and buffs  
Are scarcely seen,  
These lowly doorsteps lie.  
How welcoming have they been  
When icy winds have swept the canons clean.

## A Nation's Gift

Of all the parks our nation  
    Has laid at her people's feet  
The mystic Mesa Verde  
    Most throbs with the mighty beat  
That links the past and present  
    In a cycle of charm complete.

In her, one catches an echo  
    From those who marked the past  
With seals of eternal kinship  
    With worthwhile things that last,  
Communion of soul and body  
    In Time's strange molding cast.

Other parks have their rich allurement,  
    Their beauty and wonder-ways  
Which lead the soul to enchantment  
    Through many a dreamful maze;  
But no other pathway leads so near  
    To the folks of other days.

## Challenge

We are the riddle of the ages—  
Lost children of the Mesa—  
Ask nothing of us.  
Ask of the whispering pinon trees;  
They know; perhaps they will tell:  
Ask of the junipers.  
Perhaps they will tell;  
Pharaohs have left their records in sealed chambers,  
But we—we swept our little buff dwellings clean  
And went our way.

## Once Upon a Time

“Aliksai,” meaning, “Once upon a time” or “Thus it was.”

So started all the legends

Which Tachu told the young lads in the kivas.

Wonder tales they were, with witches and with fairies;

And there were always magic hoops

With which to foil the knave—

You know how these things run in fairy stories—

The bad man, victor first, then powdered like the finest dust

Of crumbled cliffs.

No wonder dark-eyed youth looked dreamily

Down coming ages since the past so overflowed with lore

Of Underworld and Overworld

No wonder they built castles in the clay,

Then vanished to build newer sorts again;

“Was this thing true?” their question ever asking.

Perhaps their “Happy ever after”

Was kin to our trite finishing of fairy tales:

Like us, perhaps, they learned to question life.

## Nature's Grindstones (Axe Rock)

Mother Nature was most kindly

To her first children;

For, sensing their necessity,

She placed her grindstones at convenient angles

Where they might sharpen their stone implements.

Still may one see where many patient men

Have fashioned to their need the patient stone

Products both of dust of centuries.

Perhaps they understood each other

And the unending weariness of things.

## Echo Cliff

Square tower, with beams still holding fast  
And partial roof of saplings  
Bound by withes of sarvisberry,  
Sepulchre of arrow-pierced home-makers  
Who've lain on silent guard  
Through many years,  
Do you crouch silent under Echo Cliff, O Tower,  
And hear strange voices beating through your doors  
And windows?  
Voices of white men, raucous and unrythmic,  
Coming to mingle for a moment  
With the treasured sounds of voices muted long  
Asleep within your walls?  
Do you not sense a different quality,  
A softer tone when back you cast the echo  
To curious seekers of sensation there  
Across the canon?

## Yucca At Ute Line House

Yucca against the crumbling pile  
Of Ute Line House,  
You, the sturdy warrior of drouth,  
Saw-edged, tough fibered, known to weavers past,  
Seeking your nourishment from rock and sand  
And bringing forth your waxen whorls of blossom—  
Waxen and pure like alabaster carvings—  
Tell me, are these your votive gifts  
Laid at the pale bronze feet  
Of some lone maid who perished in this tower?  
Have her soft hands caressed  
In other days the flowers  
Which have spelled Spring to her?

## Brothers of the Trail

Jingling their bells, on the Mesa hobbled,  
The pack-horses pass a sometimes leisure day.  
At night they munch their grain or hay  
Or mill about in friendly confab or in argument.  
Theirs, a strange life of duty to their changing  
masters

Pursuing beauty they cannot understand;  
And theirs the thanks for pat of friendly hand—  
The thrill of brotherhood with him who rides.  
Sure-footed go these patient ones  
Who carry us to wonder scenes.

To them, all praise, all kindness and all love  
Reflecting infinite tenderness which dwells  
In the All-Heart above—  
That Heart which understands their inmost need  
and ours—  
Dumb brothers of the trail.

## A Grave

Within a grave midst myriads yet uncovered  
There lies a skeleton, his bowl beside him,  
Although the food for his far journeying  
Has nourished earthworms of grim ages past.  
An agate arrowhead, sharpbarbed, is there  
With little pictured trees mossing its lucence;  
But shaft and bow and bowstring have long  
feathered  
Impalpably into dust with all the substance  
Which once clothed that bone structure lying there  
Defenceless from the curious eyes of strangers.

## A Potsherd

I'm wondering what secret of dead days  
Lies in the curious, primitive design  
About your broken rim,  
What messages may not be written there  
To which we have no key :  
I wonder if the hand which fashioned you  
Still seeks for forms of beauty to transcribe :  
I wonder if dark eyes are watching now  
As I hold up this little sherd of clay  
And smiling into mine as though to say,  
"So fleeting was our day—as are yours now—  
'Tis something to have left behind  
Some little lasting thing—  
Even some broken thing  
Which we have made one happy day  
And seemed to lose again."

## Dove of the Wilderness

It is no wilderness to the pale grey dove  
While there across the blue-green tableland  
Her mate is calling.  
Nor is it wilderness to him who calls,  
Preening the opalescence of his plumage,  
So long as she, his cooing one, is answering.  
That is not mourning in the notes we hear;  
It is the ecstasy of longing and of love.

## Long House

Straggling along the face of Wild Cat Canon  
Lies Long House—rightly named.  
It is like some burrowed barracks  
Housing a warrior tribe.  
But silent now are the tom-tom calls to battle,  
The sharpening of spear-heads and of axes.

## Willow Wall House

The Willow Wall door stands ajar  
Its stiffened wands still holding the clay covering.  
Perhaps some star-eyed maiden,  
Hastening to her lover down the crooked trail,  
Forgot to swing it to on its pole hinges :  
Perhaps she nevermore returned  
But went across the Mesa to her lover's lodge—  
Defying custom that he dwell in hers—  
But maybe mother left ajar the door  
That her child might see light upon the hearth  
And come again in peace.

## Giant Finger

Like a stubby finger, whose fellows lie deep buried,  
Old Stone Post points through tangles  
That witches have tied in the bushes  
On top of a sunken mound.  
Does the finger point in derision  
At the world above the ground  
Where pygmies live their puzzled lives  
While underneath them lies the peace of ages?  
Or does it point to something in the sky?  
Who knows?

## Vision

Last night when the moon rode high  
I saw the corn maiden—the maid of golden maize.  
She wore no festal robe  
And a girdle of opals held her somber habit.  
There were tears in her eyes:  
Then a rainbow came and ringed the moon  
And I was comforted.

## Navajo Watch Tower

In this land of strange turrets  
You stand, old Navajo Watch-tower, on your  
boulder grim,  
And Alkali Point makes a rugged rim  
Then falls from your curve into greyness.  
Down there lie skeletons buried deep —  
Dry bones of those men who used to dwell  
Secure while their watchmen guarded.

## The Postern Gate

Why shouldn't there be a postern gate  
At Balcony House?  
For, quiet as a mouse,  
Wouldn't someone be sure to slip in too late  
For the ladders to be out-hung?  
There must have been love songs to be sung  
At Balcony House.

## Banshee

Tearing to shreds the stillness of the night,  
Curdling the blood, blenching the cheek,  
Again comes that shriek unearthly.  
A screech-owl? No. Well, yes, perhaps.  
Still, can it be that that small brown thing  
With blinking eyes unable to move,  
Sitting on a bough facing my searchlight  
Is my banshee?

## Swallows' Nest House

They say the bats have taken lease  
Upon the little house called Swallows' Nest;  
But I have seen the swallows skimming too  
Up to the habitation named for them.  
I have seen eagles, turkey buzzards, crows,  
And other winged things  
Darting and circling round these man-built nests  
Still wondering, maybe, why the wingless ones  
Should choose such perilous places  
For their homes.

## Grass Canon Tower

Upon the edge of Grass Canon  
Where choke-cherry bushes froth in Springtime  
frenzy,  
This brave old tower rears his rugged head.  
Long has he withstood tempest and storm  
Yet stands he staunch though ravaged by the ages.  
But, when Spring dances down the canonways  
With banner all unfurled,  
Perhaps his old stones are again a-throb  
With passion that lurks in the pulsing sod.  
He looks so very buoyant there  
All draped in white and green.

## The Sleeping Ute

The sun is lingering along the rim of dreamy canons,  
Low junipers and pinon trees like mosses lie  
In blue-green softness  
Between the rocks and sky.  
Lance points gleam bright with ruddy light  
Signaling each other;  
While mottled slopes slip drowsily  
To slumbrous depths below.  
And away out there past the Painted Butte  
Lies the form of the Sleeping Ute  
His patient face turned peacefully  
Up toward the sky curving like a pottery bowl  
Fashioned from Mancos clay.

## Ship Rock

Out there on New Mexican plain  
Sailing your prairie main,  
I glimpsed you first, Ship Rock,  
As I stood on Park Point overwhelmed  
By the beauty circling about me.  
They say you are built of stone,  
But I know better than that.  
I know you're a Viking ship,  
With billowing sails full set  
And someday you'll make the harbor.

## Deer

Above Grey Tower, the other day,  
I saw a little flock of deer  
Timidly gazing first this way, then that;  
And I felt glad that no wild beasts lurked near  
In Lion Canon,  
I joyed that no swift, feathered arrow-point  
Might find its wing-ed way to lay them low—  
They were so timorous.  
Below them there, the tower's foundation lay  
In preservation, mocking at decay;  
While up above,  
The little eager things on slender legs  
Carried their tender, living temples  
Here and there through pinoned pathways  
In security.

## Spruce Tree Camp

Like the hub on an enchanted wheel  
Lies Spruce Tree Camp.  
Its roads, smooth ribbon spokes,  
Trail invitation through the low treed greenery  
To scenes of untold witchery.

## The Park Superintendent's Lodge

A super-lodge it is, with spacious rooms,  
Floored, ceiled, and fitted in the native pine  
Rubbed grey with Mancos shale;  
With walls, color of bisque—  
The bisque shade of cliff dwellings  
When sunlight touches them.  
The furniture of this super-lodge is carven  
And hand-hewn by the indwellers  
Who have dreamed their home into the loveliness  
Of visions that come true.  
There is a subtle blend of the needed things of now  
Soothed into restfulness of tone and line  
Belonging to the yesterdays of time.

## The Hostelry

Surrounded by its brood of white tent houses,  
It nestles in the pines—  
This little hostelry amidst old shrines,—  
Inviting those who come in beauty's quest  
To linger for a little while and rest.  
And, when at night the camp fire has burned low,  
And songs grown silent like an echo spent,  
The little hostelry shuts her eyes at last  
While her tent children slip into the past  
Along the way of dreams.

## The Nation's Buildings

Sheer on old Navajo Canon's shelving edge,  
Facing the sleeping village neath its spruce tree,  
Stand the buildings of the Nation.  
Stone are they like that of the living rock  
Which gives them foothold.  
Here are the records made by famous men—  
Who open pages of past centuries;  
Here, too, the illustration drawn  
By peoples of the dawn—  
Relics of basketry, of pottery, of weaving,  
Sandals of yucca and quaint feather work  
Bespeak the women's zeal;  
While crude stone grinding bins, hammers, axes,  
And agate arrowheads suggest man's stronger arm.  
Then, speaking more of spirit, are the prayer plumes,  
And wallets for sacred meal—  
But, last and saddest, bits of human framework  
Of those who cast the meal in hope  
Or placed the feathered sticks.

## The Young Guide

It seems so strange to find in youth  
A passion for antiquity;  
Yet, this young guide, whom it is joy to know,  
Is set aglow  
By every scrap of painted sherd,  
By luck charms of some vanished race:  
And how his face  
Shines when his eager eyes  
Descry some worthy prize to place  
Among the Nation's relics!  
His tireless feet essay the steepest trails;  
Like tempered steel, his sinews and his bones;  
A very derrick, he, at lifting stones!

## Spring House and the Natural Bridge

How many hours have lovers  
Loitered upon the Natural Bridge, I wonder—  
Singing their little songs of love and life  
Before they passed along?  
Were there more frequent weddings held at Spring  
House  
Because the bridge was near at hand?  
Did hearts throb faster here at tender words—  
At dark eyes huge with meaning?  
Did bronze cheeks glow more ruddily,  
Did hearts grow dizzier  
And send the stone bridge rocking like a boat  
In ecstasy? I wonder.

## Ladders

Sometimes, just toe-holes in the living rock;  
Sometimes, slim poles  
With crossbars lashed in place with throngs of skin;  
Sometimes, a single pole with niches  
Cut by stone axe—now splintering  
Slowly, reluctantly, loth to give up  
Its mission to help others to ascend.

## The Spectre-Skull

A skull, all eyes and leering smile,  
Held into semblance of a human face  
By parchment bones that crumble at a touch.  
There for uncounted ages it has lain  
Protected by a ledge.  
Then did they bring a camera to bear  
On its defencelessness;  
The plate developed, lo! they found  
Two skulls instead of one—  
The new one smaller, a woman's  
It would seem—  
And the two grinning mouths lay close together  
As though two lovers had made tryst in death  
Facing the centuries of decay in rapture.

## Inaccessible House

Under the tip-topmost rim  
Of Navajo Canon  
Inaccessible House clings gamely  
As though digging its toes deep in the shale  
Afraid to go higher or lower.  
What sort of rope ladder, I wonder,  
Was used when its builders were busy  
Fashioning their little nest.  
Oh surely their clan slept the soundest  
When plainsmen were yelling above them  
War cries of the nomads of prairies.

## Double Walled Tower

Why did they build you with double walls, adobe  
filled,  
O Tower in the Mancos Canon?  
Were you planned for mysterious uses  
Which called for thicker walls than other towers?  
Were you, perhaps, used for mystic rites  
Which even clansmen must not know about?  
Were Shamans only—having blest access to “Those  
Above”—  
Given favor there to whisper  
To North, to South, to East, to West  
To Sipapu, the underworld, to upper regions of the  
air?  
O Tower, why were you built with double walls?  
I wonder.

## Spring Cave

Cool water from the cleft  
Inside the cliff-bound cave  
Precious must it have been to weaving women long  
ago  
Who quaffed it as they wove warm feather robes  
On their rude looms,  
While yucca and milkweed warps teased tireless  
fingers  
To picture scenes viewed from the doors of caves.  
It must have been as though one made sweet music  
on a harp  
Whose warp was golden strung.

## Sandals

In a certain little nook,  
Where crumbled walls have formed a cache,  
Sandals have been found—  
Little ones and big, gay and somber ones.  
Some may have danced to music of romance;  
Others, perhaps, trod ceremonious measure;  
Still others, made of toughest yucca fibre,  
May have fled down war-paths ahead of foes  
From dreaded plains below.  
Perhaps this little haunted chamber,  
Where half worn sandals lie—their journeys done—  
Belonged to the chief cobbler of the Cliffs.

## Kodak House

On a shelf of soft pumice and tufa  
You stand 'neath a miniature arch  
With tiny out-buildings—  
A villa of mimic proportions.  
At a distance you seem a doll village  
That the long-ago children have played with  
And left standing there in neglect.  
I'm sure mud-pies crisp in your ovens  
Into odd little sherd.  
And I'm sure your old walls are still echoing  
With laughter of sweet childish voices  
Up there set away on your shelf.

## Cedar Tree Tower

This ancient cedar tree must have been a seedling  
Long centuries after the five pillars had been  
wrought  
To hold your roof, Tower of Antiquity.  
What stories might you tell,  
Had walls but tongues as well as ears—  
Stories of tragic happenings, of peace and love  
Which these home-loving people sought  
Under the cliffs—cliffs which must have seemed  
Like angels' wings spread out  
To shield the Little People of Dawn Days.

## Old Crows

Two crows came lumbering down the sky  
In search of their last year's lodge,  
But they found the twigs had grown brittle and dry.  
"Why didn't we build us a nice mud nest  
Under the cliff with the swallows?  
Then could we rest,"  
Said they—as they flew away.

## CONTENTS

Page.	Page.		
LITTLE THEATRES .....	5	DUSK ON THE MESA.....	24
AS DUST ARE THE DEAD		DOOR STEPS .....	24
YEARS .....	6	A NATION'S GIFT .....	25
CLIFF PALACE .....	6	CHALLENGE .....	25
MESA VERDE .....	7	ONCE UPON A TIME.....	26
SUN WORSHIPPERS .....	7	NATURE'S GRINDSTONES.....	26
THE METATE .....	8	ECHO CLIFF .....	27
CANONS AT SUNSET.....	8	YUCCA AT UTE LINE	
A PRAYER BASKET.....	8	HOUSE .....	27
SPRUCE TREE HOUSE.....	9	BROTHERS OF THE TRAIL.....	28
MESA WINDS .....	9	A GRAVE .....	28
PAINTED HOUSE.....	10	A POTSHERD .....	29
RAINBOW FLOWERS.....	10	DOVE OF THE WILDER-	
KNIFE EDGE CLIFF ROAD.....	11	NESS .....	29
A LOVE SONG.....	11	LONG HOUSE .....	29
BLUE FEATHER ROBE.....	12	WILLOW-WALL HOUSE .....	30
SEA SHELLS.....	12	GIANT FINGER .....	30
BALCONY HOUSE.....	13	VISION .....	30
PRAYER PLUMES.....	13	NAVAJO WATCH TOWER.....	31
METATES AT CLIFF		THE POSTERN GATE.....	31
PALACE .....	14	BANSHEE .....	31
LIZARDS .....	14	SWALLOW'S NEST HOUSE.....	32
INSCRUTABLE .....	14	GRASS CANON TOWER.....	32
BATTLE SHIP ROCK.....	15	THE SLEEPING UTE.....	32
MESA TRAILS.....	16	SHIP ROCK .....	33
TWO STORY HOUSE.....	16	DEER .....	33
SIPAPU .....	16	SPRUCE TREE CAMP.....	34
SUN TEMPLE .....	17	THE SUPERVISOR'S	
LITTLE RED FOXES.....	17	LODGE .....	34
EAGLE NEST HOUSE.....	18	THE HOSTELRY .....	34
CASA COLORADO .....	18	THE NATION'S BUILDINGS.....	35
FAMINE .....	18	THE YOUNG GUIDE .....	35
LISTENING IN.....	19	SPRING HOUSE AND	
LITTLE COYOTES .....	19	NATURAL BRIDGE.....	36
THE DANCING COURT.....	20	LADDERS .....	36
SUNDOWN HOUSE .....	20	THE SPECTRE SKULL.....	36
THE WARDER .....	21	INACCESSIBLE HOUSE .....	37
THE PACK MASTER.....	22	DOUBLE-WALLED TOWER.....	37
A JUNIPER CEDAR.....	22	SPRING CAVE .....	38
THE WAY OF THE MOON.....	23	SANDALS .....	38
FAR VIEW HOUSE.....	23	KODAK HOUSE .....	39
THE MUG HOUSE.....	24	CEDAR TREE TOWER.....	39
		OLD CROWS.....	39







